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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to examine transfer rates for state community colleges using methodology developed by the national Transfer Assembly (TA) and analyses conducted by the SBCTC. While the TA examines outcomes for students with no previous college credit who complete at least 18 quarter credits and transfer to a state public institution after 4 years, the SBCTC analysis excludes students who started college in Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and high school or equivalency programs, and includes transfers to independent institutions. Data for the cohort entering in 1988 indicated the following: (1) according to TA data, Washington had an overall transfer rate of 24%, slightly higher than the national average of 23%; (2) this TA transfer rate varied by college, with a high of 38% at Wenatchee Valley Community College to a low of 10% at South Seattle Community College, a college with a primarily workforce training mission; (3) TA outcomes by race ranged from 13% for African Americans to 30% for Asian/Pacific Islanders; (4) including transfers to independent institutions in the analysis raised the Washington transfer rate to 32%, while removing the 18 quarter credits requirement lowered it to 13%; and (5) of the total cohort, only 40% completed 18 credits in 4 years, indicating that early attrition at community colleges accounts for transfer rates that are lower than might be expected. (KP)

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Transfer Rates for Washington Community Colleges, Washington Community and Technical Colleges. Research Report No. 94-6

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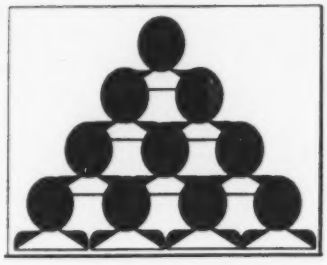

Research Report
No. 94-6

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Education Division

TRANSFER RATES FOR WASHINGTON COMMUNITY COLLEGES

August 1994

Washington community colleges transfer more than 12,000 students to four-year institutions each year. Based on comparisons with data from many other states, Washington community colleges perform slightly better than average in terms of transfer rates.

Calculation of a Transfer Rate

Transfer rates provide an indicator of effectiveness for the transfer mission of community colleges. Ideally a transfer rate would be calculated based on the number who transferred at a specific point in time from a cohort who started with the goal of transfer. Unfortunately the latter number is difficult to define given the fluidity of goal definition for community college students[1]. Additionally, data on student goals upon entry is not collected at many community colleges in other states and thus is not available for comparison purposes. As a consequence, a pragmatic, though less than ideal transfer rate methodology, the Transfer Assembly Rate, has been developed and is becoming the national defacto standard for a transfer rate indicator.

The factors used in creation of the Transfer Assembly Rate have been developed by the staff of the Center for the Study of Community Colleges at UCLA. The factors used best reflect the reality of data available across the country rather than the data which might be most meaningful given the information available for analysis in Washington. However the opportunity to compare Washington figures to a proxy for the nation and the ability to create additional transfer rates based on Washington specific data outweigh the disadvantages of the Transfer Assembly definitions. That rate is based on tracking a cohort of students over a four year period who were new to college (no prior college experience) and enrolled in and completed at least 18 quarter credits of college-level instruction including developmental courses. Students are regarded as having transferred if their social security number matches to the enrollment file at a public four-year institution in the same state.

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[1] For example, two out of five community college transfers who completed a bachelor's degree in Washington state in 1988 reported that they had no intention of achieving the bachelor's degree when they first started at the community college. Many students increase their aspirations while enrolled at the community college and it is likely that their educational experience contributes, in part, to that rise in self-expectation. This rise in student aspirations is a recommendation in favor of the inclusion of all students in transfer rate cohorts.

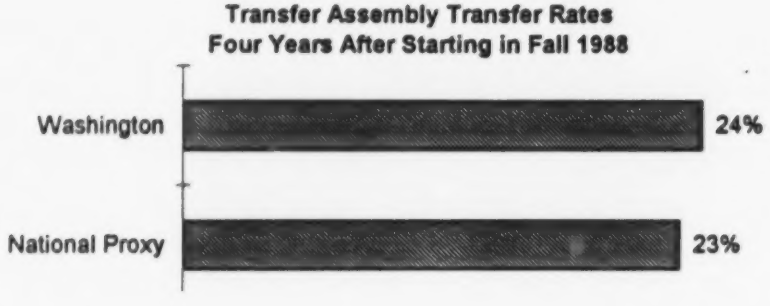
In Washington, the analysis excludes those who started college in the Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and high school completion or GED programs. The analysis also excludes those who brought in credits from a prior institution. Each year approximately one in five new students transfer in credits from another institution. Many of these students are preparing for transfer to a four-year institution, but for comparability reasons these students with prior college experience are excluded from the analysis.

While the Transfer Assembly Rate is based on transfer to public institutions in the state, the SBCTC tracking includes other four-year institutions as well. For analysis of the cohort starting in 1988, transfer data were available for Gonzaga, Seattle Pacific University, University of Puget Sound and City University. Also, SBCTC maintains information on transfer for all new college-level students regardless of whether they completed 18 credits. Thus Washington is able to look at a "raw" transfer rate for all students as well as the Transfer Assembly Rate.

Capturing the transfer rate at four years may be a little early. Given the stop-out and part-time pattern of some successful students, transfer rates may rise after five or even six years. At four years, some 22 percent of students who completed 18 credits were still enrolled at the college. Clearly some of those students will successfully transfer. To account for this potential, SBCTC also calculates a leaver transfer rate. That rate excludes from the analysis all students who were still enrolled somewhere in the community college system.

Washington Transfer Rates

Washington has a Transfer Assembly transfer rate of 24 percent. That is slightly higher than the national average which has remained at 22 or 23 percent over the past several years. Washington serves a significantly higher proportion of full-time students (half full-time) than community colleges elsewhere in the nation (about 36 percent full-time). This difference in student population, which resulted from more than a decade of enrollment limits that precluded opportunities for part-time students, likely explains the slight difference in transfer rates.



The Transfer Assembly transfer rate varies by college with a high of 38 percent to a low of 10 at a community college with a primarily workforce training mission. The differences are shown in Table I.

Table I
Transfer Rates for New College Level Students Fall 1988
As of Spring 1992

	Transfer Assembly Cohort*	
	Number in Cohort	Washington Public 4-Year % of Transfer
Peninsula	169	25%
Grays Harbor	144	21%
Olympic	338	19%
Skagit Valley	382	24%
Everett	437	18%
District		
Seattle Central	377	23%
Seattle North	309	26%
Seattle South	332	10%
Seattle Voc Institute		
Shoreline	747	30%
Bellevue	872	32%
Highline	413	19%
Green River	612	29%
Pierce	595	22%
Centralia	275	23%
Lower Columbia	324	16%
Clark	500	18%
Wenatchee Valley	229	38%
Yakima Valley	476	34%
District		
Spokane	521	16%
Spokane Falls	724	25%
Big Bend	88	32%
Columbia Basin	603	28%
Walla Walla	275	24%
Whatcom	113	32%
Tacoma	349	24%
Edmonds	318	28%
So Puget Sound	171	22%
Community College Total	10,693	24%

* 18 or more college level quarter credits, new in Fall 1988, no prior college.

Source: Transfer Assembly Data File.

Transfer Rates by Race/Ethnic Group

The Transfer Assembly rates are calculated by race group. For Washington the rates ranged from 13 percent for African Americans to 30 percent for Asian Americans as shown in Table III.

Table III
Transfer Assembly Project Rate
% of Students Completing 18 Quarter Credits Transferring in Four Years, 1988 Cohort

African American (263)	13%
Asian/Pacific Islander (658)	30%
Hispanic (248)	20%
Native American (153)	20%
White (8,865)	24%
All Students (10,693)	24%

Rates varied by race in a similar pattern even when student intent was the same and course thresholds were applied - that is, all students included in the rate analysis had completed the same college-level English or math classes in preparation for transfer (see Table IV). Just a third of the African Americans with intent to transfer who completed 18 credits and college-level math actually transferred to Washington public or independent colleges within four years of initial entry at the community college. By comparison, the majority (57 percent) of Asian Americans under similar conditions transferred in that same time period. No doubt some of this difference is due to a preference of some African Americans to transfer to predominately black institutions elsewhere in the country while Asian Americans transfer primarily within the state.

Table IV
Course Threshold Transfer Rate:
% of Students with Transfer Intent at Exit Completing 18 Quarter Credits and Specific College-Level Courses, Transferring in Four Years, 1988 Cohort

	English	Math
African American	24%	33%
Asian/Pacific Islander	52%	57%
Hispanic	38%	45%
Native American	37%	42%
White	45%	45%
All Students	42%	48%

Why are Transfer Rates Lower than 50 Percent?

Regardless of how the rates are calculated, transfer rates fall below half the group that started at the college when measured four years later. Clearly not all students, even those with intent to transfer, will carry through on those plans, so rates of 90 or 100 percent are not to be expected. But why are the rates not higher than 50 percent? Rates could be low due to high attrition early on in the student's career - after completion of 18 credits, but before completing the courses needed for transfer. On the other hand, attrition might be low and the transfer rates still low due to "leakage" at the point of transition to the four-year institution. In Washington it is clear from other research that the former is a more significant issue than the latter[2] and further analysis using Transfer Assembly database confirms this view.

[2] See the report **Transfer Outcomes in Washington Community Colleges**, Operations Report 94-which suggests that "leakage" is minimal at the point of transition - most who want to transfer are able to do so and to make reasonable progress at their four-year institution. The report also provides data on the numbers of students planning to stay at the college for two years who leave the college long before they achieve that goal.

Several other transfer rates can be calculated using the Transfer Assembly cohort tracking method. Table II shows the transfer rate when transfers to independent institutions are used in the calculations. That rate is higher than the Transfer Assembly rate and consistent with the rate for the past three years which were similarly calculated. A "raw" transfer rate to public and independent institutions for all students regardless of credits completed is about half the Transfer Assembly rate as most of those who do not complete 18 credits are not prepared for transfer. In Washington state about 39 percent of new students stay at the college long enough to complete 18 credits - generally two quarters of enrollment. Transfer rates can also be calculated for those who complete certain courses typically needed for the bachelor's degree. Rates are also calculated by student intent, including only those who plan to transfer.

Another approach to transfer rates is to exclude from the calculation those who were still enrolled at a community college at the end of four years. Some 22 percent of those meeting the Transfer Assembly tracking guidelines were still enrolled at the college four years later. When excluded from the calculations, the "leaver transfer rate" jumps to 33 and 46 percent.

Table II
Other Transfer Rates, 1988 Cohort Transferring in Four Years

	Type of Transfer Rate	Transfer Rate
All transfers	18 credits completed and transfer to public and independent institutions	32%
Raw Rate	No credits completed screen and transfer to public and independent institutions	13%
English Threshold	18 credits and first college English completed and transfer to public and independent institutions	42%
Math Threshold	18 credits and first college math completed and transfer to public and independent institutions	48%
Transfer Intent	Transfer intent at exit and 18 credits completed and transfer to public institutions	36%
Leavers Only	Leavers with 18 credits and transfer to public four -year institutions	33%
Leavers Only with Transfer Intent	Leavers with 18 credits and transfer intent upon exit and transfer to public four-year institutions	46%

Source: Transfer Assembly Database.
Note: Table VI at the end of the report provides two of these additional rates by college.

The database used for calculating the transfer rate provides evidence of the early attrition. Of the total cohort used for analysis, just 40 percent completed 18 credits as shown in Table V. The national proxy is 50 percent completion of 18 quarter credits, however in states using the semester system, 18 credits (15 semester credits) can typically be completed in one semester rather than the two quarters typically required in Washington community colleges.

Table V
Cohort Size at Various Thresholds

Thresholds	Cohort Size	Percent of Base Cohort
New Students Tracked	27,038	
Completing 18 Credits	10,693	40%
Completing College English and 18 Credits	8,100	30%
Completing College Math and 18 Credits	5,100	19%

Source: Transfer Assembly Database.

The number of students who stay at the college long enough to complete 18 credits and math is small - 19 percent of those starting four years earlier. Related research also confirms that nearly half the degree seeking students leave the college after a couple of quarters and before achieving their goal[3] In Washington, with tight enrollments at four year institutions, students with 90 quarter credits are most likely to be accepted as transfers. Those who leave after only two or three quarters at their community college will have greater difficulty in the transfer process. Thus in Washington it appears that it is early attrition at the community college that accounts for transfer rates below 50 percent.

[3] See Student Progress - Comparisons Over Time, August, 1994. SBCTC Research Report 94-5.

Table VI
Leaver Transfer Rates for New College Level Students Fall 1988
As of Spring 1992

	Leaver Transfer Assembly Cohort*		Leaver Transfer Intent at Exit**	
	# in Cohort	Washington Public 4-Year % of Transfer	# in Cohort	Washington Public 4-Year % of Transfer
Peninsula	141	32%	85	47%
Grays Harbor	119	26%	73	41%
Olympic	231	29%	95	43%
Skagit Valley	315	29%	203	41%
Everett	318	29%	143	45%
District				
Seattle Central	269	33%	179	44%
Seattle North	233	37%	140	53%
Seattle South	251	14%	69	48%
Seattle Voc Institute				
Shoreline	598	41%	439	52%
Bellevue	689	44%	440	50%
Highline	270	33%	134	52%
Green River	507	37%	335	48%
Pierce	470	29%	337	34%
Centralia	225	29%	27	59%
Lower Columbia	251	22%	136	33%
Clark	371	24%	171	37%
Wenatchee Valley	211	42%	130	61%
Yakima Valley	388	43%	237	60%
District				
Spokane	421	20%	153	45%
Spokane Falls	589	32%	441	40%
Big Bend	71	41%	26	58%
Columbia Basin	454	38%	161	48%
Walla Walla	230	28%	165	37%
Whatcom	86	43%	72	47%
Tacoma	272	36%	186	43%
Edmonds	227	43%	152	59%
So Puget Sound	138	28%	76	45%
Community College Total	8,345	33%	4,805	46%

* 18 or more college level quarter credits, new in fall 1988, no prior college.
**18 or more college level quarter credits, new in fall 1988, no prior college, and transfer intent at exit.

Source: SBCTC Transfer Assembly Data File.